

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 140592
ORIGIN EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SP-02 SS-15 L-03 ICA-11 H-01
CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 NSC-05 /060 R

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EUR:JEGOODBY
EUR/CE:WMWOESSNER

-----062334 030210Z /73

P 022325Z JUN 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, SCUL, CPRS, GE, US

SUBJECT: CULTURE MINISTER HOFFMANN'S CALL ON ASSISTANT SECRETARY VEST

REF: (A) BERLIN 1923, (B) BERLIN 3699

1. GDR CULTURE MINISTER HOFFMANN'S HALF-HOUR CALL ON ASST. SECRETARY VEST WENT SMOOTHLY, CONSISTING, IN THE MAIN, OF AN EXCHANGE OF PLEASANTRIES ON THE DRESDEN EXHIBIT AND THE RECENT PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE IN OUR CULTURAL RELATIONS. ONLY SUBSTANTIVE ISSUE RAISED BY VEST WAS QUESTION OF FEININGER PAINTINGS. HOFFMANN, WHO HAD OBVIOUSLY BEEN WELL BRIEFED ON SUBJECT, PRESENTED MODIFIED, PERHAPS MORE PALATABLE VERSION OF "EXCHANGE" PROPOSED IN GDR NOTE OF MARCH 15 (REF A). HE ESCHEWED DIRECT LINKAGE, HOWEVER, AND EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS TO TURN OVER FEININGER PAINTINGS NOW.

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2. CALLING FEININGER "BEST EXAMPLE OF HUMANISTIC, ANTI-FACIST TIES BETWEEN US AND GDR," HOFFMANN REVIEWED HISTORY OF CASE. FEININGER, HE RECALLED, HAD TO FLEE NAZI GERMANY QUICKLY, LEAVING PAINTINGS WITH "FRIENDS" WHO TURNED OUT TO BE SELFISH AND TO HAVE LITTLE REGARD FOR CONDITION OF PAINTINGS. LATTER HAD TO BE RESTORED IN BERLIN MUSEUMS BUT WERE NOW IN EXCELLENT CONDITION. HAVING "NO DOUBT ABOUT PROPERTY

SITUATION," HOFFMANN SAID HE WOULD BE "HAPPY TO BE ONE TO HAND OVER PICTURES IN GOOD CONDITION." HE ASKED VEST TO HAVE SECRETARY DISCUSS DETAILS OF TURNOVER WITH FISCHER, SINCE THAT IS MFA MATTER, AND ASKED THAT EXCHANGE BE PUBLICIZED.

3. CLAIMING THAT HE WAS NOT LINKING EXCHANGE TO COUNTER DEMANDS OR CLAIMS, HOFFMANN REFERRED TO A "LIST OF 20 CULTURAL OBJECTS BELONGING TO GDR IN US." WHEN QUESTIONED ABOUT THAT NUMBER AND REMINDED THAT ONLY TWO POSSIBLE CASES WE WERE AWARE OF INVOLVED DURER PAINTINGS AND EIGHT POSTAGE STAMPS, HOFFMANN AND AMBASSADOR SIEBER SMILED, SEEMING TO SUGGEST THAT "LIST OF 20" WAS MEANT AS A JOKE OF SORTS. HOFFMANN DID, HOWEVER, GO ON TO PROPOSE A "HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGE OF CULTURAL OBJECTS." THIS, HE SAID, WOULD BE A "STRATEGIC ARRANGEMENT NOT LINKED TO DETAILED EXCHANGES OF SPECIFIC OBJECTS." HE RECOGNIZED, HE SAID, THAT THE "HISTORICAL BACKGROUND DIFFERS IN EACH CASE" AND THAT "EACH CASE MUST BE JUDGED ON ITS OWN MERITS."

4. BASED ON ABOVE CONVERSATION AND AMBASSADOR'S WITH FISCHER MAY 31 (REF B), WE HAVE ADDED CONTINGENCY TALKING POINT ON FEININGER TO BRIEFING PAPER (BEING POUCHED) FOR SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH FISCHER EXPRESSING A WILLINGNESS TO RETURN TO GDR ON CASE-BY-CASE BASIS OBJECTS WHICH OUR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COURTS HAVE RULED BELONG TO THE GDR. CHRISTOPHER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CULTURES, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, MEETING REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE140592
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: VGRAY
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780232-0299
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t197806100/aaaadikq.tel
Line Count: 95
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 9e1b077c-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: 78 BERLIN 1923, 78 BERLIN 3699
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2137588
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CULTURE MINISTER HOFFMANN'S CALL ON ASSISTANT SEC- RETARY VEST
TAGS: PGOV, SCUL, CPRS, GC, US, (HOFFMAN, HANS-JOACHIM), (VEST, GEORGE S)
To: BERLIN
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/9e1b077c-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014